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RESEARCH MEMORANDUM 61-2

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Exit Interviews

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AN ANALYSIS OF EXPERIMENTAL EXIT INTERVIEWS.

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AN ANALYSIS OF EXPERIMENTAL EXIT INTERVIEWS

BACKGROUND

DCSPER has a requirement for the early identification of enlisted men who meet current entrance standards but whose overall cumulative record in the Army is likely to prove unsatisfactory. The Retention Standards Task of the Human Factors Research Branch was established in response to this requirement. The ultimate goal of this research is the identification of unacceptable personnel prior to induction. As an intermediate goal, the task seeks this identification early in basic training, at which time separation action can be taken.

A wide range of potential measures and procedures for the identification of the unacceptable soldier are being evaluated under this task. Since failure to adjust to the Army--particularly failure of a disciplinary nature--is the principal basis for large numbers of unfavorable-type discharges, measures of soldiers' motivation and adjustment have been sought. In this connection, two instruments, a background questionnaire and a self-description blank, have been constructed.

PURPOSE

The purpose of the ~~present~~ study was to provide cues for additional items to be used in revising the Personal History Form, OA-1. An additional purpose was to identify those items in the existing Personal History Form and the Self-Description Blank, SD-1b which appeared to discriminate between unacceptable personnel and personnel of a normal Army input population.

- PROCEDURES

Tape-recorded interviews were conducted with enlisted men who received other-than-honorable discharges. Only men who expressed a willingness to participate were interviewed. This procedure was followed in order to secure cooperation from the men and in the hope that they would be more willing to give background information. A content analysis of these experimental exit interviews was made to tap attitudes and background factors relevant to military delinquency.^{1/}

^{1/}The content analysis was conducted by 1st Lt. G. E. McCullough while serving as a mobilization designee with TAG Personnel Research Group, US Army, from 17 to 31 August 1958.

SAMPLE

The total sample consisted of 100 enlisted personnel receiving other-than-honorable discharges at the Transfer Station, Ft. Dix, New Jersey, in July 1958. From these 100 tape-recorded interviews, 32 were selected for the presently reported content analysis.^{2/}

A portion of the content analysis dealt with a dichotomization of the 32-man sample in which an attempt was made to study any factors differentiating pre-service delinquents from pre-service non-delinquents. The pre-service delinquents were identified by reported arrests, convictions, probations, or institutional commitments, while the pre-service non-delinquent group consisted of men with no pre-service arrest records. Of the 32 soldiers 26, or 81%, were classed as non-delinquents, and 6 reported themselves as having a criminal record of some degree.

VARIABLES

The taped interviews in general covered the following areas:

1. Attitudes toward the Army at time of entry
2. Family background
3. Vocational history
4. Educational history
5. Pre-service delinquency
6. Attitudes toward the Army at time of interview

Reference variables included the Personal History Form (OA-1), individual 201 files, information on personal background, and discharge data.

The Self-Description Blank (SD-1b), while not administered to the present sample, was examined for items which aptly expressed statements made in the interviews.

^{2/}An analysis of the remaining taped interviews by Retention Standards staff members revealed findings similar to those reported by Lt. McCullough and, consequently, no additional reporting was undertaken.

RESULTS

Very few of the soldiers had any disciplinary trouble prior to going overseas to Germany and France. Of the 32 cases only two had graduated from high school. Most of the soldiers were RA; only five were inductees. Of the total, 50% reported that they came into the Army with the idea simply of completing their Service obligation. Nearly all of these soldiers complained that their difficulties arose during off-duty hours, and that their adjustment at their assigned jobs was satisfactory. Unfortunately, the impact of the news about receiving an undesirable discharge resulted in their dwelling primarily on their Army experiences. Consequently, insufficient background data was elicited to secure much worthwhile information, but discounting the superficial reasons given for quitting school, the most frequently cited handicaps were: (1) a broken home, (2) family hardship, and (3) conflict with the father or guardian.

The principal theme of the interviews was the trouble originating from failure of inter-personal relationships. The most frequently mentioned problem was unsatisfactory treatment from the Commanding Officer. This may have resulted in part from the fact that they were scheduled for a "208" board by the Commanding Officer. Almost as many complaints were cited about NCO relationships. These soldiers were apparently unable to accept orders gracefully from their NCO's. Frequently, there were complaints of harassment, prejudice, and interference with their activities after normal duty hours. Only a very few men reported refusing to obey an order from an NCO, but most indicated that misconduct became their mode of adjustment to such stress.

At least 50% of the group expressed strong resentment toward complying with Army rules and regulations. The most frequently mentioned irritation was the regulation of their off-duty time, with bed-check at midnight being the principal offending policy. There was no evidence to indicate that they were aware of the requirement in the Army of being available for duty 24 hours a day. They were deeply resentful of any encroachment upon off-duty time such as "overtime" work on the job, special duties in the company area at other than normal duty times, and too close supervision of personal affairs.

Of less importance but still factors which were mentioned in about 30% of the cases were excessive drinking and general immaturity expressed by uncontrollable temper, gross lack of tact, and "following the crowd". Most of the soldiers in the sample drank; they felt that there was little else to do and, as stated above, only 30% actually felt that alcohol was a major adjustment problem.

While the sample of six pre-service delinquents is not large enough to draw specific conclusions, certain factors may warrant further investigation. Five out of six of these soldiers reported themselves as being

service obligation oriented and the sixth person had no plans for staying in the Army for a career. Five out of six of these men indicated strong dissatisfaction with Army officers. Four out of the six soldiers admitted that excessive drinking and disregard for Army rules were of primary importance with respect to their misconduct in the Army. Four out of six were married and in each case various marital difficulties were cited and Army service was perceived as being detrimental to family life because of enforced separation due to overseas service.

In the pre-service non-delinquent group, the idea of making a career of the Army appeared more often than in the delinquent group. Quite often these soldiers took a short discharge in order to re-enlist at a time when they enjoyed a particularly satisfying assignment, only to find themselves subsequently on an overseas shipment.

SUMMARY OF OBSERVATIONS FROM RECORDINGS

1. All had expressed willingness to be interviewed, but few showed any desire to elaborate on their home background.
2. Most claimed their trouble originated overseas in Germany.
3. Most work records were good; work was considered the main criterion of a good soldier.
4. Most of their difficulties were associated mainly with off-duty time.
5. Some were aware that Army policy with regard to off-duty regulation is different from that of the Air Force and were somewhat resentful.
6. Most had quit school in favor of work, getting more money, etc.
7. Few showed any insight into why they were regarded as undesirable by the Army or how they had failed to be "good soldiers."
8. Most expressed a desire for reinstatement.
9. The majority had no complaint about the Army as a whole, only with the particular segment in which they found themselves.
10. Some cited lack of counseling.
11. In some cases punishment was resented as harsh and out of proportion to the conduct involved.
12. Most seemed to feel the present Army to be too impersonal.

SUGGESTED ITEMS

Reference to the Personal History Forms completed by these men revealed that some of the statements made in the interviews were also aptly expressed by items in the form. These items are listed here in order that at a later date it may be possible to test the hypothesis that they identify certain characteristics of this sample which are different from those of a normal group. On a priority basis, certain items will be identified in the Self-Description Blank^{3/} as being descriptive of the sample. Suggestions will be made as to specific item material which might help to discriminate between the characteristics of this sample and those of a normal population.

The following items were thought to be related to home background for this group. (Alternatives are omitted):

QA-1

- 14. Were you ever fired from a civilian job?
- 25. How many courses did you fail in high school?
- 26. If you did not finish high school, what is the main reason you dropped out of school?
- 30. How often did you get into fights when you were a kid?
- 35. Were you ever arrested when you were a civilian?

SD-1b

- 31. Have you always had it pretty tough?
- 84. Have you ever been in trouble with the law?
- 133. Did you hang around with a street-corner gang when you were a kid?

Suggested New Items

- 1. Although your father loved you, do you feel that he was far too strict?
 - A) Yes
 - B) No

^{3/}This refers to Self-Description Blank, SD-1b, which is administered by Tape recording. PT 3099, the manual, contains a transcription of all items. Only file copies of the manual are available.

2. Would you trust your brothers to handle an important money transaction for you?
A) Yes
B) No
3. Has family hardship caused you to lose out on the good things of life?
A) Yes
B) No

The following items were thought to be related to attitudes toward officers:

QA-1

153. How many of your officers take a personal interest in their men?
158. If you had a serious personal problem, would you go to the company commander for help?
162. In your outfit, what do you think would happen to men who go AWOL?

Suggested New Items

4. Have you ever felt that someone in authority had it in for you?
A) Yes
B) No

The following items were thought to be related to attitudes toward NCO's:

QA-1

154. How many of your noncoms take a personal interest in their men?
157. If you had a serious personal problem, would you go to the first sergeant for help?
169. Having to obey orders that don't seem to make sense
182. Getting fewer privileges than other people in the same organization

SD-1b

- 21. Are you the kind of guy who can take orders without arguing?
- 43. Do you usually get the dirty end of the stick?
- 48. Can you take just so much and then you give way?
- 95. Would you say that you have no enemies who really wish to harm you?
- 116. Is it always a good thing to be frank, that is, to say what you think?
- 120. Would you have done better if people had not had it in for you?

Suggested New Items

- 5. Do you feel that your immediate superior should receive the same punishment as you for violation of Army rules?
 - A) Yes
 - B) No
- 6. After you have done something wrong and get punished for it, do people continue to bother you?
 - A) Yes
 - B) No

The following items were thought to be related to failure to conform to rules and regulations:

OA-1

- 163. What do the men in your outfit think of a soldier who goes AWOL?
- 168. Having to observe strict rules and regulations
- 172. Being expected to go to bed and get up at certain hours

SD-1b

- 7. Are you a hard worker?
- 8. Would you want any job where you have to work overtime?
- 76. Is it all right to get around the law if you don't actually break it?

Suggested New Items

7. Would you break a rule if you knew that you would surely be caught?
A) Yes
B) No
8. After breaking a rule and being punished, do you feel that it should not be held against you if you are caught again soon?
A) Yes
B) No

The following items were thought to be related to marital and family troubles:

QA-1

3. How old were you when you were first married?
15. Are your parents or grandparents partly or wholly dependent on you for support?
138. Does your being in the Army cause any special hardships or problems to your wife or family?

Suggested New Items

9. Is it a matter of great importance that you not be assigned where your family is unable to accompany you?
A) Yes
B) No
10. Do you have outstanding debts which are:
A) less than \$100?
B) less than \$500?
C) less than \$1,000?
D) more than \$1,000?
11. How close to your home do you feel that you should be stationed?
A) Within 100 miles
B) Within 300 miles
C) Within 700 miles
D) Makes no difference

The following items were thought to be related to general immaturity:

OA-1

- 178. Not being as intelligent or as well educated as the people around you
- 181. Having to control your feelings

SD-1b

- 28. Do you have a bad temper?

Suggested New Items

- 12. When you were in school, which did you prefer?
 - A) Having one teacher for all of your subjects
 - B) Having a different teacher for each subject